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Message Text

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ORIGIN PA-02

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 ARA-10 AF-10 EUR-12 IO-13 INR-10
USIE-00 CCO-00 SSO-00 NSCE-00 INRE-00 /058 R

DRAFTED BY PA/PRESS:JHTRATTNER:BAW
APPROVED BY PA/PRESS:JHTRATTNER
S/S-O:TGMARTIN
----------070656 010127Z /73
O 010053Z APR 78 ZFF4
FM SECSTATE WASHDC
TO USDEL SECRETARY IMMEDIATE

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FOR HODDING CARTER FROM TRATTNER

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: OVIP (VANCE, CYRUS R.), SOPN

SUBJECT: DEPARTMENT PRESS BRIEFING MARCH 31, 1978

1. CUBANS IN ETHIOPIA: WE NOW ESTIMATE AT LEAST 15,000 CUBANS, OF WHOM MAJORITY ARE COMBAT TROOPS. I UNDERLINED THIS DOES NOT REPEAT NOT MEAN THAT LAST WEEK, OR THREE DAYS AGO, OR YESTERDAY THERE WERE 13,000 AND THAT NOW THERE ARE SUDDENLY 2,000 MORE; RATHER, THESE FIGURES ARE BASED ON CONTINUING EFFORT TO ASSESS SITUATION THERE. WE HAVE NO WAY TO GET PRECISE FIGURES AND MUST BASE OUR ESTIMATES ON INFORMATION AVAILABLE TO US. THIS SHOULD NOT REPEAT NOT BE SEEN AS REPRESENTING SUDDEN INCREASE, BUT MERELY RESULT OF CONFIRMATION AND PERHAPS RECONFIRMATION OF INFORMATION AS IT BECOMES AVAILABLE. I SAID WE HAVE NO EVIDENCE CUBANS ARE ENGAGED IN ERITREA. (WE NOTE LATER STORIES FROM LAGOS QUOTING ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL THAT
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WHITE HOUSE ESTIMATE IS NOW 16,000 OR 17,000; ALSO THAT SOME OF THESE ARE BEING DEPLOYED AGAINST ERITREANS. I AM BEING ASKED ABOUT GAP BETWEEN FIGURE I USED AND THAT COMING FROM PARTY, AND AM NOTING ONLY THAT I USED PHRASE QTE. AT LEAST 15,000 UNQTE.).

2. OGADEN: I DECLINED OFFER ANY DETAILS ON REPORTS OF

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FIGHTING IN AREA OR OF ETHIOPIAN MIG RAIDS ON SOMALIA, BUT NOTED THAT SOMALIA TWO DAYS AGO CALLED FOR NEUTRAL PEACEKEEPING FORCE IN OGADEN TO STOP ALLEGED QTE. GENOCIDE UNQTE. OUR UNDERSTANDING, I SAID, IS THAT OAU GOOD OFFICES COMMITTEE, CHAIRED BY NIGERIA, IS SCHEDULED MEET IN LAGOS IN APRIL TO CONSIDER OGADEN PROBLEM. WE HOPE BOTH ETHIOPIA AND SOMALIA WILL PARTICIPATE WITHOUT TAKING POSITIONS OR SETTING PRE-CONDITIONS THAT WOULD COMPLICATE NEGOTIATING PROCESS. WE HAVE NO EVIDENCE ETHIOPIA IS COMMITTING REPRISALS IN OGADEN; AS A MATTER OF FACT, THERE IS EVIDENCE GOING IN OPPOSITE DIRECTION (ETHIOPIA HAS INVITED OBSERVERS FROM FRIENDLY COUNTRIES AND CHARITABLE AGENCIES).

3. GWERTZMAN HAD STORY MARCH 31 INDICATING U.S. HAS DECIDED CONTINUE ACCEPTING SUBSTANTIAL NUMBERS OF INDOCHINESE REFUGEES, THROUGH INTERIM PROGRAM AS WELL AS PROPOSAL FOR LEGISLATION FOR LONG-TERM PROGRAM. TO QUESTIONS, I SAID I UNDERSTOOD PRESIDENT HAS ACTED IN THESE TWO AREAS, BUT CAUTIONED THIS WAS BY NO MEANS FINALIZED OR ABOUT TO BE ANNOUNCED. THERE MUST BE GOOD DEAL OF CONSULTATION WITH OTHER GOVERNMENT AGENCIES AND WITH CONGRESS.

4. ON U.S. CITIZEN LOUIS LEFEVRE, RE-ARRESTED BY NIGERIANS MARCH 31, I NOTED ONLY OUR AWARENESS HE HAD LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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BEEN TAKEN INTO CUSTODY AGAIN, AFTER BEING RELEASED MARCH 30 ON DOL. 7,500 BAIL. COOPER

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Message Attributes

Automatic Decaptioning: X
Capture Date: 01 jan 1994
Channel Indicators: n/a
Current Classification: UNCLASSIFIED
Concepts: TOSEC, DEPARTMENTAL ADMINISTRATION, PRESS CONFERENCES
Control Number: n/a
Copy: SINGLE
Draft Date: 01 apr 1978
Decaption Date: 01 jan 1960
Decaption Note:
Disposition Action: RELEASED
Disposition Approved on Date:
Disposition Case Number: n/a
Disposition Comment: 25 YEAR REVIEW
Disposition Date: 20 Mar 2014
Disposition Event:
Disposition History: n/a
Disposition Reason:
Disposition Remarks:
Document Number: 1978STATE083815
Document Source: CORE
Document Unique ID: 00
Drafter: JHTRATTNER:BAW
Enclosure: DG ALTERED
Executive Order: N/A
Errors: N/A
Expiration:
Film Number: D780141-0382
Format: TEL
From: STATE
Handling Restrictions: n/a
Image Path:
ISecure: 1
Legacy Key: link1978/newtext/t197804103/aaaadjuc.tel
Line Count: 96
Litigation Code IDs:
Litigation Codes:
Litigation History:
Locator: TEXT ON-LINE, ON MICROFILM
Message ID: 146835a6-c288-dd11-92da-001cc4696bcc
Office: ORIGIN PA
Original Classification: LIMITED OFFICIAL USE
Original Handling Restrictions: n/a
Original Previous Classification: n/a
Original Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Page Count: 2
Previous Channel Indicators: n/a
Previous Classification: LIMITED OFFICIAL USE
Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Reference: n/a
Retention: 0
Review Action: RELEASED, APPROVED
Review Content Flags:
Review Date: 28 apr 2005
Review Event:
Review Exemptions: n/a
Review Media Identifier:
Review Release Date: n/a
Review Release Event: n/a
Review Transfer Date:
Review Withdrawn Fields: n/a
SAS ID: 2826060
Secure: OPEN
Status: NATIVE
Subject: DEPARTMENT PRESS BRIEFING MARCH 31, 1978
TAGS: OVIP, SOPN, (VANCE, CYRUS R)
To: SECRETARY
Type: TE
vdkvgwkey: odbc://SAS/SAS.dbo.SAS_Docs/146835a6-c288-dd11-92da-001cc4696bcc
Review Markings:
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